VANISHING CULTURE OF THE ARMY NATIONAL GUARD

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VANISHING CULTURE OF THE ARMY NATIONAL GUARD

The purpose of this paper is to answer the question: Will our national defense be better served if the Army National Guard (NG) surrenders its unique and historical organizational culture and fully adopts the culture of the active Army (AC)? The Commission on the National Guard and Reserves presents the primary driver advocating a "shared culture" between the NG and AC in the final report to Congress. This Commission "was established by the Ronald Reagan National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2005."[1] As prescribed, its overarching purpose was to "assess the reserve component of the US military and to recommend changes to ensure that the National Guard… organized, trained, equipped, compensated, and supported to best meet the needs of US national security."[2]

The Commission on the National Guard and Reserves submitted its third and final report to Congress in December 2008. The report represents the "most comprehensive, independent review of the National Guard and Reserve forces in the past 60 years".[3] One of the report's recommendations is to blend all elements of the military into a "shared culture"[4]. For example, the report indicates that the Secretary of Defense should recognize that a "cultural divide" exist between the active and reserve components, and there is a need to develop a new "Total Force Integration Policy" in order to achieve the "next level of integration".[5] Of concern, is whether actions that may be taken by legislators and executive leaders that may lead to negative unintended consequences. Furthermore, the Commission's culture sharing recommendation is likely a response to the ongoing wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and therefore may not be necessary. Additionally, recommendations from the Commission appear to be based

upon the argument that the National Guard must be prepared at all times to integrate into the AC. The converse was never mentioned. Phrases such as "how they [Reserve Component] will be integrated into the total force"[6] promote a damaging mindset, which fails to realize a scenario where the National Guard may serve as the supported element with supporting elements coming from the AC. The most glaring false premise resides in their discussion on the *Nature of the Reforms*. As stated, the proposed reforms must "build upon the jointness among the military services, developed as a result of the Goldwater-Nichols Act, to create an effective operational reserve force whose units and individuals can rapidly integrate with the active component".[7] "This operational reserve must be readily available for emergencies at home and abroad, and more fully integrated with the active component."[8] Missing throughout the Commission's document is recognition of the relationship between NG units with community and state responders. The whole focus of the Commission's report appears to be centered on present overseas engagements.

In order to analyze the impact a shared culture may have on the security of our nation, it is imperative to first define culture. The next step will be to demonstrate the relationship between culture and performance. Performance will then be used synonymously with the term readiness. In turn, case studies on corporate mergers will be examined to determine their result on pre and post-merger expectations. With these factors in mind, the next step in this paper will be to examine the unique historical and leadership style of the NG. Finally, this paper examines the interconnected relationship between the NG and their supported communities. These factors taken as a whole will lead to the conclusion on whether a shared culture, as recommended by the

Commission on the Guard and Reserve, would in fact strengthen or weaken our national defense.

<u>Defining Organizational Culture</u>

Before discussing culture, the concept must be defined. The Commission on the National Guard and Reserves provided a definition of culture in their submission to Congress. By the Commission's definition, "Culture refers to the characteristic attitudes and practices within an organization or society:"[9] Many of these attitudes and practices drive actions in a variety of situations because they are rooted in unspoken beliefs and rituals."[10] However, this definition, like most definitions of culture leaves little room for quantitative analysis or its impact on an organization. In order to reach a clearer understanding of culture researchers have segmented culture into various aspects and analyzed them using various methods discussed in a later section.

Even though there is no universally agreed upon definition of culture, one commonly accepted aspect is language. This aspect is an initial building block for any effective organization. Roberto Weber and Colin Camerer provide a comprehensive description on the origin of an organization's culture. They contend that every organization develops and refines a specific set of communication shortcuts. These shortcuts are developed and understood over time in order to create efficiencies and develop cohesion amongst team members."[11] Anyone who has worked with the military can appreciate the efficient set of unique communication skills used by every member. The military has refined their language over time almost to the point that anyone not a member of a particular organization will have no idea what is being communicated between members of the same group.

This is not to suggest that language alone is key to understanding an organization's culture, Weber and Camerer also point to broader aspects. Shared experiences such as basic training ensure organizational members understand traditions and they are helpful in informing members on how to coordinate activity optimally. [12] The Army as a whole is composed of members who underwent basic training and other common training events that shaped their understanding of the organization's core values and purpose.

Two other scholars, Daniel Denison and Aneil Mishra, sum up organization culture describing it as a "symbolic representation of past attempts at adaptation and survival as well as a set of limiting or enabling conditions for future adaptation".[13] Indeed, the NG has demonstrated persistence in surviving for more than 350 years predominately operating in a domestic environment and under the control of their state's governor. In contrast, throughout the last century, the AC has predominately been a force of projection into foreign nations under the direction of the President. Looking toward the future, both the AC and NG must anticipate and plan for relevancy in both domestic and foreign domains and under conditions of a more strained economy.

Now that definitions of culture have been reviewed, it must be determined what links exist between organizational culture and organizational performance. This point will be discussed in the next section using the studies from Weber and Camerer as well as Denison and Mishra. Their studies assist in illustrating how culture is linked to performance. Performance, in military jargon, is referred to as readiness. There are studies of the corporate environment, which clearly demonstrate misunderstanding regarding the impact of culture on performance. The findings show a failure to

appreciate the link between culture and performance led to sharp declines in organizational performance.

Methodologies for Examining Causal Relationship between Culture and Performance

In the corporate domain, culture sharing is analogous to a business merger. Three significant studies in the field of corporate mergers and the impact of culture in the post-merger environment provide some insights into what may be expected if US senior leaders act upon the advice of the Commission and adopt culture sharing as a desired end state.

First of all the performance of companies in the post-merger environment rarely lives up to the pre-merger expectations. George A. Marcoulides and Ronald H. Heck conducted a study that examined the causal relationship between culture and performance. The model used in their experiment posited the "existence of several latent, or hypothetical, variables which together comprise visible aspects of an organization's culture and, in concert, are believed to influence organizational performance."[14] The Commission's report suggests many issues stand as barriers to a shared culture and recommend a "true partnership" should exist between components.[15] This line of thinking is analogous to corporate merger expectations.

Consequently, Marcoulides and Heck used a different approach. They developed a computer-generated program named "Linear Structural Relations."[16] Through design and measurement techniques, Marcoulides and Heck believe they have a system for assessing some aspects of organizational culture as it directly or indirectly effects organizational performance.[17] The observed aspects of their model included organizational structure, organizational values, task organization, organizational climate, employee attitudes, and organizational performance.[18]

The Marcoulides and Heck study serves as a beginning in understanding the

"relationships among variables comprising organizational culture and to estimate their

relative effects on performance"[19]. Their conclusions are relatively consistent with

"previous research that has suggested that variables associated with organizational

culture are predictive of organizational performance".[20] The multidimensional construct

of their experiment demonstrates a clear cause-effect relationship between culture and

performance.[21] Their results also point to the need for organizational leaders to utilize

organizational design strategies and task organization techniques that "most effectively

convert goals into desired performance outcomes".[22] These designs and techniques

are unique between the NG and AC and will be discussed in a later section. However,

the external environment demands the differences, which is radically different for both

components. For example, the NG must share a culture with local and state responders

if they are to be an effective element of power for their governor. The mission of the AC

does not require a similar type of relationship bonding.

Reinforcing these conclusions is a study by Daniel R. Denison and Aneil K.

Mishra. They also developed a model for studying the correlation between

organizational culture and effectiveness.[23] These researchers sought to discover

"cultural dynamics that appear to be most closely related to effectiveness".[24]

Specifically, their goal "was to identify a broad set of traits that can enable a fuller

understanding of the impact that culture has on effectiveness."[25] Denison and Mishra's

studies indicate critical links among mission, culture and effectiveness.[26]

Additionally, the broad range of companies studied by Denison and Mishra

provides different parallels from which to draw likely conclusions if the NG was to adopt

the culture of the AC. One such study was that of People Express Airlines. Like the NG, People Express encouraged an egalitarian workforce that was considered more egalitarian than their competitors were. The same is true for the NG relative to the AC. The organizational and operational environment of each demands such a difference between the two components. The majority of NG members spends most of their time outside of the traditional military chain of command and earns their wages in a different sector of society. Not only do most NG members not depend on their service as a primary means of income, they do not fall under the traditional hierarchal chain of command during off duty periods. Other differences are pertinent. Most NG members do not depend on their military service to provide healthcare to their family and the NG member is not subject to the Uniform Code of Military Justice except when mobilized in support of a federal mission. These aspects alone demand different employee supervisory relationships than exist in the AC.

Denison and Mishra's study of People Express Airlines yielded results that can be extrapolated to understand more completely the National Guard culture. People Express created a "highly egalitarian organizational culture".[27] "All employees held the title of manager, owned stock, and shared profits".[28] Each employee became a self-manager, practicing "responsible autonomy".[29] The natural tendency from the senior executives of People Airlines was to focus "more emphasis on their social technology and internal integration than on external adaptation."[30] Such fixations on the internal environment can ultimately led to a failure of the airline to maintain a competitive advantage with other airlines. This example demonstrates a concern or failure to understand the changing external environment and overly resisting the need to adapt to

that changing environment. Similarly, the Commission's report articulates a need for a shared culture between military organizations. However, the report fails to suggest or recognize the need for interoperability between community, state and federal response agencies.   The report simply fails to recognize the totality of the external environment.

Mission alignment is another area where the NG and AC differ. The NG is operational at the state and community level while serving periodically as an augmentation for AC forces overseas. Only a myopic point of view would hold that the National Guard's expeditionary focus would dominate forever. Even though there has been an unprecedented use of NG forces in support of combatant commanders in Iraq and Afghanistan, the primary mission of the NG remains under the direction of their governor. The Commission's report is suggesting a significant change in mission, if the authors are recommending the NG focus predominately on surging to support overseas operations as its primary role.

Denison and Mishra's study of Medtronic Corporation provides insights in to understanding the impact of a change in mission.   Medtronic was founded on an "explicit vision that goes beyond a solely economic rationale".[31] The company was a "premier firm in the cardiac pacemaker industry"[32]. The employees held a deep sense of personal conviction in their product. The "purpose and destiny" of the company went well beyond its "goals as a business".[33] When a new chief executive officer focused on a more rigid bureaucratic structure to oversee increasing government regulation, the congruency between employee and mission began to diverge. The steady growth that the corporation had realized in sales and profit began to falter.[34]

Similar shortcomings are likely to occur if there is even a perceived shift in mission for the members of the NG. Joseph Galioto writes in his analysis of the organization of the Army National Guard that a "sub-culture exists that has as its very core, a shared value system that places emphasis on the freedom of the citizen to pursue his/ her own interests, while at the same time providing for the common defense of the community and nation: the citizen soldier".[35] The NG soldier does not sign up for the same reason an AC does. Most NG soldiers pursue a life outside of the military yet maintain a deep conviction of being ready to support their community and nation in time of peril.

Finally, contributing to the understanding of the complexities of merging organizational cultures, Denison and Mishra introduced a term from the field of psychology into their studies and applied it to organizations: alloplastic.[36] This word describes the capacity for an organization to change in response to external conditions without abandoning its underlying character.[37] The term precisely defines the tensions being felt throughout the NG as it demonstrates equality of effort and performance abroad as well as a need to remain true to its home state community needs. The extended, unprecedented war abroad, fought by an all-volunteer force, has diminished the abilities of some to see beyond the war and to a time when the primary effort of all NG members and units will return to community support and a strengthening of relations with local responders.

Culture holds significant power over organizations. Private industry has learned this lesson.   Culture is pervasive and therefore should not be ignored or underestimated when considering mergers.[38] "It affects how the everyday business of

the firm gets done—whether there is shared understanding during meetings and in promotion policy, how priorities are set and whether they are uniformly recognized, whether promises that get made are carried out, whether the merger partners agree on how much time should be spent, and so forth."[39] The Commission's report on the Guard and Reserves recommends a greater sharing of cultures between the NG and AC. Proponents of this idea should clearly understand the complexities of this task and be careful not to underestimate its impact.

The lessons from the corporate domain demonstrate the cause and effect relationship between culture and performance. Corporations that understand this aspect design structures that optimize performance at a higher level. Performance is tantamount to readiness in military terminology. Now that it is clear that culture plays a significant role in the performance of an organization, it is time to examine the impacts of fusing multiple cultures into one. This is important because the authors of the Commission's report are fundamentally recommending a fusion when they propose culture sharing and integrating of NG forces into the total force.[40] Again, lessons from private industry provide key indications on what can be expected in a post merger environment between the NG and AC of our army.

Corporate Lessons in Mergers

Roberto A. Weber and Colin F. Camerer designed an experimental approach to study the behaviors and performance of mergers between teams. Weber and Camerer postulated two key dynamics. First, pre-merger expectations would underestimate the impact of culture on performance. Second, rather than culture, factors such as incompetence, would be attributed to failure during post-merger.[41] The researchers further hypothesized that "if even this minimal aspect of culture results in post-merger

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difficulties in simple firms consisting of only two or three employees, then we would expect that differences in more elaborate forms of real organizational culture would result in potentially even greater conflict."[42]

Their effort examined the difficulties in groups that must combine their independently refined set of shared knowledge.[43] The researchers predicted a conflict between the merging firms' cultural conventions for problem solving and a failure to appreciate the severity of the merging task.[44]

The conflict arises from an overestimation for the success of a potential merger, which rests in focusing on concrete aspects of key business trends. Examples of these trends include metrics in capital, technology and labor costs. These trends fail to measure culture because it is just too difficult and too easily discounted as less important. Consequently, there is an overestimation in the new value of a merged corporation as well as an unrealistic expectation regarding the time it will take to merge the two organizations completely. When conflicts arise, the corporate leaders are typically unprepared to resolve them as they were never fully anticipated or appreciated during the premerger phase of planning.[45] Serious concerns such as these are likely to arise if the authors of the Commission's report are only studying metrics such as the time it takes to mobilize a NG unit or the gap between mission essential task training and the required training for directed missions abroad. These metrics do not take into account the different culture of the NG. In fact, they almost suggest they are irrelevant with what is needed in the current fight.

As designed, Weber and Camerer's study helps in understanding the complexity of mixing cultures even using a very small and simple model.[46] By their definition, "tacit

knowledge in groups" is used as a "metaphor for culture"[47] and culture is segmented to a single component: language.

More specifically, their experiment called for two separate groups to develop a unique efficient language used to identify a set of pictures. Once each group had independently accomplished this task, they were timed and rewarded for decreased amounts of time used to identify all pictures. In completing this task, the group inherently developed a set of shared words to use in describing a picture with the least amount of effort or time. Each group had a manager and it was his or her task to guide the group.[48] The groups showed remarkable ability to refine their skills and dramatically decrease the time it took to identify the photos. The experiment took shape when the groups were then mixed or merged. As expected, the same set of words was not used by both groups and therefore the efficiency level, or time it took to identify all the pictures, sharply increased when the groups merged. The researchers discovered the same task consistently took longer to accomplish during post-merger rounds."[49] In other words, post-merger firm performance was consistently lower than that of pre-merger firms.[50]

What was explored in the experiment was how "tacit shared knowledge is transferred between two groups that need to reconcile disjunctions in their knowledge, and how subjects may be biased in their perceptions of the difficulty of this process."[51]

The conclusions of this experiment contribute in understanding why many corporate mergers fail. It clearly describes the environment where underestimated impacts of cultural conflict leads to decreased performance and mistaken blame.[52] Certainly, the NG, an organization that has been supporting their community and state

for more than 350 years, has developed efficient mechanisms for dealing with their

unique domestic areas of concern. The researchers also conclude that highly

specialized skills, refined over time, may lead to a reluctance to the skills of others,

which complicates and frustrates mergers even further.[53] Merging or sharing the

cultures of two of the oldest institutions, the National Guard and the Army, in the United

States may not yield the desired outcome of better efficiencies and a safer nation that

the Commission believes can result from a shared culture.

Finally, the studies in the private sector indicate clearly that culture does affect

performance. Merging multiple cultures exacerbates the difficulties inherent in mergers.

The studies conducted in private industry as well as the case studies in experimental

companies and mergers are a clear indicator of what can be expected from a merger

between the NG and the AC. To appreciate fully the complex culture of the NG it is

necessary to look at its history as well as its management relationship with its members.

History and Leadership Style of the National Guard Serve as its Culture

The culture of the NG can be summed up in its history and in its ability to

manage both a part-time force and a full time-force when called to active duty. These

two features are what make the NG culture unlike that of their AC counterpart.

Established in 1636, the Army National Guard is the oldest uniformed service.[54]

This 370 plus year old institution continually strives to meet the needs of the state first

and then the nation. Members take an oath of enlistment or office to support both their

governor and the president. In recent years, the NG has become less a strategic

reserve and instead has assumed operational or expeditionary missions as it is used to

augment US military missions abroad. Further, in the 1990s as force structure

reductions occurred in the active component, there was an increased reliance on the

reserve components as part of operations in Southwest Asia, Somalia, Haiti, and the Balkans.[55]

Today, the NG remains steeped in local traditions and rooted in the community it supports.   Balancing a force poised for both missions overseas as well as missions at home, which is both timely and fiscally acceptable, are key tensions preventing harmony between the NG and AC. This tension likely serves as the cause for the Commission's recommendation to seek a more shared army culture.

Equally important to its unique history is the leadership style of the NG. Leaders, exercising only part time control over their forces demand a different style of leadership to optimize effectiveness. As described earlier, the NG is more egalitarian than the AC. The NG style of leadership has been labeled by Brien Smith, Ray Montagno and Tatiana Kuzmenko as servant leadership. In contrast, due to the nature of full time military service, to include the special governing laws associated with the Uniform Code of Military Justice, a transformational style of leadership is more effective.[56]   As a former student at the US Army War College pointed out: "Active duty partners often find the RC traits of volunteerism, part time duty, and 'asking before tasking' very foreign and not compatible with the AC way of doing things."[57] Although it may seem axiomatic, NG leaders are continually oscillating between these leadership styles as they transition back and forth between domestic and overseas operations. Additionally, as with any profession, leaders refine their skills over time and are rewarded and promoted according to the effectiveness of their leadership abilities. Unfortunately, the authors of the Commission's report did not fully acknowledge this value when recommending a more shared culture.

In fact, although the tone presented throughout the Commission's report appreciates NG contributions abroad, it falls short of describing a reciprocating relationship between components. In other words, the Commission recognizes a need to accelerate the gap in transitioning between domestic operations and combat operations abroad but it fails to describe a scenario where the AC may need to adapt its leadership style and culture to better integrate with NG units in the US homeland. A failure to appreciate the intricacies associated with supporting the full range of domestic response agencies may be detrimental to the defense of the United States if the nation becomes the battlefield.

Finally, it is worth examining the complex nature of the NG as it is intertwined with the various jurisdictions across our nation. Clearly, the illustrations used in previous case studies were less complex. Therefore, the difficulty in merging the NG culture with the AC culture will be much more difficult than any corporate model. What makes the NG so complex in its design? Quite simply it is because the NG is arrayed across our nation and working with tens of thousands of localities and special authorities to say nothing of understanding the scope of local resources and the influence of local politics. The established relationships as well as sensitivity to state and local issues are imperative to working effectively at those levels. They are also important because they are continually tested and they require frequent attention.

To appreciate the enormous domestic professional capacity operating in concert with the NG, refer to the Domestic Responder Capacity Comparison (Figure 1.). Every number on the right side of Figure 1 represents a special relationship with a NG individual and or unit. Not only does the NG work in partner with each of these

agencies on a day-to-day basis, many of the members serve with both the NG and a

responder organization. In contrast, not a single member of the AC is also a firefighter,

police officer, or employee of any other response organization. Additionally, the AC is

accustomed to operating in environments overseas where these critical services are

absent. Each time mutual aid between the NG and another domestic response force is

utilized, their relationship is strengthened, lessons are learned, and innovative

techniques are developed. Underestimating the nuances involved with these

relationships resembles the problems discussed in the pre-merger expectations found in

the case studies above.

Domestic Responder Capacity Comparison				
Army	532,400	[58]	Firefighters	
Navy	325,300		Career	321,700[59]
Marine Corps	194,000		Volunteer	827,150[60]
Air Force	317,050		Law Enforcement	836,787[61]
Army National Guard	352,600		Emergency Medical Technicians and Paramedics (2006)	201,000[62]
Army Reserve	205,000			
Navy Reserve	66,700			
Marine Corps Reserve	39,600			
Air National Guard	106,756			
Air Force Reserve	67,400			
Coast Guard Reserve	10,000			
Totals	2,216,806			2,186,637

Figure 1. Domestic Responder Capacity Comparison

Consequently, the NG is the only element of the Department of Defense that

continually refines its role with domestic response agencies regularly and on such a

large scale. Their special relationships represent the type of balance needed in a

fiscally restrained environment to defend our nation locally and abroad. As described

by Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, balance is a key principle of defense.[63] The

continued maintenance of the NG culture as integrated with all national response elements significantly enhances the Secretary of Defense's aim.

Further buttressing this argument, Sharon L. Caudle in her article titled "Homeland Security Capabilities-Based Planning: Lessons from the Defense Community" makes clear: "Defense normally has a top-down command and control structure with a highly disciplined attention to authority. The homeland security CBP [Capabilities Based Planning] approach at present does not adequately guide analysis when assets and capabilities to accomplish a mission are not under one jurisdiction, may be unknown, or may ebb and flow over time."[64] Fortunately, as described previously, the NG exists to complement the complexities of loosely interconnected communities and it has learned to exercise pliable approaches under varying degrees of authority and loosely formed structures.

In summary, the NG has been developing relationships with each supported community often for hundreds of years. The NG is deeply connected to the local and state professional response networks of their area and in many cases, it has soldiers and officers serving both as members of the NG and as professional responders. Consequently, the loosely connected communities across our nation are threaded together through the interpersonal and working relationships with the NG. Finally, the goal of achieving balance in our defense posture, as described by Secretary Gates, is better achieved by maintaining the interrelated relationships between the NG and their communities.

Conclusion

US national defense will not be better served if the Army National Guard surrenders it's unique and historic culture and fully adopts the culture of the active

Army. The Commission's report on the Guard and Reserve presents substantial risk to the United States by suggesting that the defense of the nation would be better served if the NG transforms to a shared culture.[65] The view presented by the authors of the Commission's report is shortsighted and fails to understand the essential relationship between culture and performance. Additionally, the report suggests the only relationships involved in our national defense are within the Department of Defense. The report falls short of appreciating the need for the NG to own a culture that best works with community and state responders as well as their active counterpart.

As clearly demonstrated in case studies from the private sector, performance decreases when changes in culture occur. This is a critical point: any degradation in the readiness of US defense forces would be detrimental to the protection of the nation. Additionally, corporate lessons in mergers consistently demonstrate less than optimal results whereby premerger expectations for improved performance are never realized.

Lastly, the majority of members in the NG believe they are part-time soldiers and full-time citizens. Their individual perspective and the governing laws, which direct their service, demand a different leadership style than the AC. Therefore, it may impossible to share the cultures of the NG and AC.   The complex interconnected relationships between the NG and their supported communities would be unraveled if the NG adopts the culture of the AC. The United States has always maintained two distinct and necessary cultures that support a balanced approach to defense. Such a division should remain in place and protected.

Endnotes

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